1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1957
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

quantities regularly in certain spots along the coast. These eggs are greatly relished by the natives.[8]

3. Kinship Customs

The enlargement of a Murngin's economic behavior is dependent on two factors: (1) the horde; and (2) certain reciprocals in the kinship structure. All the relatives of a Murngin ordinarily exchange gifts with him, but certain kinship personalities do this much more than others. The mother's brother—sister's son relationship has been seized upon as the mechanism for enlarging the economic life of a Murngin man. "Far-off" wakus and gawels are sought by a man, distant not only socially but geographically; the greater distance a man has between him and a trading waku or gawel, the greater pride he exhibits when displaying articles sent or brought to him by his relative, and the greater satisfaction he feels when sending or returning gifts. (See chapter on kinship, page 95.)

The mari-kutara relationship is much the same, except that there is a tendency to indulge in ritual gifts much more than in those from the ordinary material culture. The feathered string which has been the decorative covering of the totemic poles is sent by mari or kutara to the other. This exchange of ritual goods plays a prominent part in the economic life of the people, since if a mari receives a gift from kutara he must, in a not too great period of time, return a present of like ritual value. The finely turned string, often used as ritual string, is usually made by women, at times hundreds of feet of it. It is generously covered with birds' feathers and used on one of the larger totem poles. Obviously a great amount of work on the part of the women and the killing of a large number of birds is required to meet the needs of ritual exchange. Only the red feathers from the breasts

[8] The people of the various areas, particularly those west and east of the Goyder, are always accusing each other of cannibalism. The author can vouch that no cannibals are present among the peoples east of the Goyder and roughly in the Murngin area. The Murngin tell a number of stories of the people south of Cape Stewart which to them prove the existence of cannibalism there. Some of them claim they have seen men's baskets filled with meat which was neither kangaroo nor dunong and which they were convinced was human flesh. In one account I collected, the narrator described watching a cannibal feast. The victim, a large man, was carved and prepared for cooking. There is much scornful joking among the Murngin about these people to the west of them. When they think they see human flesh in the basket of one of these people they say, "Ah, what is this one?" and another Murngin replies, "Oh, that's a kangaroo," with a sarcastic inflection in his voice. The other one says, "Yes, but it doesn't smell just like kangaroo," to which the reply is made, "Oh, well, maybe it's only a dead man."

14: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943) 1961 OII7 Murngin OII7

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(a) *Marrngit of Mun'nyeri'nyir of Tjanapurpingo clan. The three flat objects at the top are nawas, with holes represented by spots. The winged male marrngit is Mallaperrpallawirr, the other his wife (and sister) Burrumbir. They come from Garawanna on the mainland of Arnhem Land behind Howard Island. Left, the snake Bundungo.*

(b) *The six marrngit of Wilindjango of Milijingi clan, Lower Glyde River, and the 'shade' (malli) of the marrngitmirri himself, lower right. Next to him are Nuri, male, and Murtung'dung, the female; the bulge is the womb in which she bore the four junior marrngit above.*

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(c) *Wilindjango, whose marrngit are shown in (b) above. This man was also a renowned rainmaker of his clan. The basket-like structure on his forehead is ngamak (lit. flesh), dried human flesh or mungo (blood) which are used in the practice of magic and ritual cannibalism. The two small wooden pegs projecting from the basket are yel and are made from tremored (Rhychophlebium laboucheri). They are part of the stock in-trade of the marrngit.*

(d) *Sorcerer, called ragalk or kalk', Barrow Tribe, Cape Stewart district, north central Arnhem Land, with kundjarrma, stiletto-like objects sharpened to a fine point and made from tremored called maiqin. The ragalk are said to insert these kundjarrma into the hearts of their victims by way of the neck, thence down the dorsal aorta. In this way they claim the ragalk draws out the blood of his victim. In Australia these kundjarrma are popularly known as 'pointing bones.'*

'MARRNGIT,' 'MARRNGITMIRRI' AND 'KALKA'

Photographs (c, d): D. F. Thomson

[Facing p. 97]

797 speaking groups of Elcho Island, the Glyde and Goyder
754 Rivers on the west, and eastwards around Buckingham,
[177 Arnhem and Melville Bays, to Cape Arnhem and Port
184] Bradshaw and south to Caledon and Blue Mud Bays, had little actual experience of the sinister cult of the *kalka*. But when the Methodist Mission moved from Elcho Island to the Crocodile Group and set up its headquarters at Milingimbi, an island lying a short distance off the coast, it brought the people who had accompanied the Mission into the very stronghold of a form of secret killing or sorcery that was strange to them. On this account they
609 came to regard the people of the west—whom they called
186 *warnba*, strangers—with fear and suspicion, and they have been more or less at loggerheads with them ever since,
[152] resulting in frequent blood feuds, and a considerable loss of life.

For years it was the practice of the natives who had moved from their own countries to the island of Milingimbi, into what was to them foreign and hostile territory, to discourage visits of the local people by acts of aggression and violence, depending on the Mission to protect them from reprisals.

797 Mr. Webb, who was in charge of the Methodist Mission
728 in the Crocodile Islands, once informed me, when I was at
722 Milingimbi during a brief respite from patrols on the mainland of Arnhem Land, that in the early days of the Mission there he had once, to maintain peace, bought all their fighting spears from the natives, but that when an attack from the mainland was reported to be imminent he had had to re-issue these—though in actual fact the attack
609 did not occur.
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As often occurs when a people are brought into contact with those of a different culture, the natives from the east tended to exaggerate traits of the Burara that they regarded
[520] as undesirable and often told me ribald stories stressing the misdeeds of their neighbours. After a long recital of the faults of the Burara, whom he stigmatized as *warnba*, one informant remarked by way of special emphasis, '*yappa lukka!*'—they cohabit with their sisters. The brother-sister
[835 tabu is rigidly enforced in east Arnhem Land. Even to
684] mention the name of a woman in the presence of her brother is a grave ritual offence, called *mirriri*, and brother-sister incest is a crime for which there is no expiation, punished by the death of both parties.

582 The charge of incest against the Burara may owe its
835 origin to the fact that these people, unlike their neighbours to the east, had a normal tribal organization, which meant that members of clans of opposite moieties within the tribe and of the appropriate kinship status could marry, since the tribe is not exogamous. Because people between
582 whom marriage was permitted were actually members of
835 the same tribe, the practice would suggest incest to their
152 neighbours of the east, already fearful of the magic of their
186 *kalka* and ready to attribute to these people practices that were to them anti-social and unnatural. This attitude of the Elcho Island people was well shown by the fact that they charged their neighbours with cannibalism and said of
● [24] them '*ngamak lukka*'—they eat flesh (human)—overlooking the fact that they themselves also practised a form of ritual

[p. 99(A)]

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cannibalism which they regarded as indispensable to a hunter in order to maintain his prowess at a level that could earn for him the coveted title of *tjambait*.

During much of the time—amounting to several years—that I lived in Arnhem Land I hunted with groups of the status of horde, which often claimed one or more *marrngitmirri*. I frequently saw these men practising their cult, and was able to make a detailed study of both *marrngitmirri* and *kalka* while I lived a nomadic life with these people.

Kalka *and* Marrngit

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The cult of the *ragalk* or *kalka*—*kalk*' of the Burara—, to which I have referred, is believed to be used to bring about the death of a man who has been made a scapegoat—frequently by a rite of augury—for the death of a member of an enemy horde. Often the victim will be a man against whom the deceased or his group have harboured a grievance of long standing, perhaps because he has failed to honour some payment such as that obligatory to one who has been present at a *ngarra*—or clan totem—ceremony, to make a ceremonial presentation of *ngata*, food (really vegetable food), or of *gerri*, goods, valuables, to the elders of this clan. Of this obligation they say 'to pay back that *marr*'—to propitiate the *malli* of the culture hero whose totem is involved. This *ngata* and the *gerri* presented by men who have attended the *ngarra* by invitation, are dedicated to the *wangarr* and are said to be *yarkomirri*, *i.e.* sacramental. Failure to discharge the obligation to make expiatory payments of the kind that I have mentioned places a man in danger of death by magic, even after a long period of time.

[688 689] [776 782]

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In Arnhem Land the belief is held that the death of any person in full possession of his social personality is due, not to what the white man terms 'natural causes' but to the act of an enemy, often a person who is believed to bear a grudge, real or imaginary, against the deceased. Even death from sickness or drowning, from attack by shark or crocodile, and especially from snake bite, is not regarded as the primary cause, but merely the agent used by an enemy, or by a *ragalk* whose aid he has enlisted, to bring this about. The only exception to the belief about natural death is extreme old age, when, in the words of one of my informants, the people say 'time belong him now'—his time is spent, he has lived his life. Certain types of swellings and deformities are believed to result from ritual visitation or punishment by the *wangarr*, the totemic ancestors, for the violation, even accidental or inadvertent, of a tabu, particularly on the eating of foods which are prohibited at certain critical stages in a man or woman's relation to his family or horde, as at initiation, on the death of near kin, or during pregnancy. Boils of a type distinguished as *marlung* are believed to be due to ritual punishment and so held as proof of the violation of a tabu, usually on the eating of food that is *duyu* (tabu) at critical stages in a man's life.

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A man in east Arnhem Land named Nyarrang pointed to a large tumour on his neck and told me that it was due to the *malli birlma*—*i.e.* a blow from the 'shade' or spirit of an implement called *birlma*—used today as a mallet or hammer in food-preparation by women, and 'found'

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

Preface

ARNHEM LAND! Here fish climb trees, the sun sets in green fire and women hoard human skulls. It is the home of Stone Age man who shaves his head, and dismembers and bakes a body before eating it to absorb warrior-strength. The witch-doctor is supreme and treats fevers by massaging, pummelling and sucking gravel, blood, and animal bones from dumbfounded patients. Beside the backwaters of the untamed north, Stone Age nomads continue their ageless life and timeless practices.

Little is known of the Australian aboriginal except that in the Stone Age he broke away or was driven out from the rest of the human race and wandered to Australia. He possessed a continent at the cost of becoming isolated from the rest of the human race. Other nomadic hunters evolved into pastoralists or agriculturists but the aboriginal was denied normal development, for neither Stone Age nomad nor modern scientist has succeeded in adapting indigenous food-plants to everyday needs, and no Australian animal has been domesticated—as Dr Gilruth once succinctly remarked: 'You can't ride a wallaby or milk a wombat.'

Aboriginal development was not stimulated by the white man and his nineteenth-century civilization. As early as 1860, the explorer McDouall Stuart built his cairn, marked his tree, and recorded: 'I am now camped in the centre of Australia; I have marked a tree and planted the British flag there. We gave three cheers for the flag, the emblem of civilization, religion, and liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilization, and Christianity is about to break on them.' But every pioneer was not a Stuart, and as Dr Madigan says: 'What did break on the

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15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Burial Rites and Cannibalism

DEATH and burial customs are much the same from one end of Arnhem Land to the other. Bodies are artistically painted and decorated before they are buried or exposed on platforms or in trees. Later the bones are collected and hoarded by relatives till they feel disposed to deposit them in decorated burial posts. In one district bones are removed from the body and parts of the flesh are eaten in an effort to form a link with the dead. This ceremonial cannibalism is confined to three or four hordes, but all Arnhem Land nomads attempt to communicate with their dead and call on them for assistance.

Mau's young son slipped from an overhanging tree, and in falling into the water struck his head on a canoe. No one saw the accident and he was not missed till his body drifted downstream to the beach. Two youths carried the corpse to the camp, but by coming into contact with it they had attracted its spirit or 'mali', which lodged in their skin. Before they dared to eat any food they must needs free themselves from the ghost by smearing red-ochre on their arms.

That night the entire camp of several inter-related hordes combined in a ceremony conducted by the child's grandfather. Alternately he wailed and sang a prayer to the spirit of his dead brother, the child's tribal grandfather, asking him to come and take the young spirit to the spirit world of 'Buralkor'. The camp set about preventing the spirit or mali from haunting them, and drove it from the camp by switching their bodies with heated leafy twigs.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

mainland to hunt for turtle eggs, the island is deserted.

I saw hordes behind Boucaut Bay practising a form of cannibalism and eating their dead. A wealth of tradition lies behind this custom, which originated with the eating of their tribal Ancestress. This prehistoric giantess came from the west and finished her labours at Boucaut Bay, where she made a plain and a swamp full of vegetable food and fish. Near by she bore children and established the local hordes. Many years later the Goddess died and left the horde the problem of disposing of her body. She had been an active Goddess, and the hordes had depended on her, and now, as they had no desire to lose the prestige she had given them, they retained her strength by eating her body.

The precedent of the Goddess is advanced as the reason for continuing the custom of eating dead relatives and enemies killed in battle. All hair is scraped off and burnt, intestines are removed and buried, and the head is severed from the trunk. Meanwhile relatives prepare an oven by digging a trench, lining it with stones, and lighting a fire on top. When the tempo of singing and dancing has increased to fever-pitch, the skull is pierced and the brain removed, wrapped in bark, and given to the mother to guard. The skull is cooked, separately cleaned, painted, and hoarded. Removing the bones is a lengthy process and must be done carefully so as not to sever the limbs. All bones are exposed in a tree to bleach before being painted and hoarded till it is convenient to pack them in a burial-post.

When the stones in the trench are hot, the coals are scraped away, and a relative grasps the hands of the now boneless and headless body, drapes it over his shoulders and dances among the chanting, wailing horde. It is lowered into the trench-oven, covered with bark and sand and allowed to cook to the accompaniment of singing and dancing. Most chants relate to the departing spirit, and in

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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them the strength of the dead man is urged to enter the bodies of those who have consumed his flesh. 266 764 [533]

Nomads cheerfully admitted that they enjoy the feasts, but pointed out that aged, deformed, sick, or diseased men are never eaten. These have no virtue and would weaken rather than strengthen those participating in the rite.